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A young girl with braided hair, wearing a pink shirt, is sitting at a desk in a classroom. She has her right hand raised high, and she is looking towards the right side of the frame with a slight smile. In the background, other students are visible, some with their hands raised. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

DIVERSE NOT DIVIDED: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

College or Bust?

Unlocking the Promise
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Breaking Down Barriers:
The Schott Foundation and
Girls' Equity in Education



BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: THE SCHOTT FOUNDATION AND GIRLS' EQUITY IN EDUCATION

By Dr. John H. Jackson, President/CEO and Nakisha M. Lewis,
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While our national conversation on education has finally begun to focus on young men of color, little attention is paid to the unique challenges and circumstances facing young women,

particular young women of color, in the classroom. The “school-to-prison pipeline” – harsh school discipline policies and a lack of supports that combine to push students out of the classroom and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems – affects both young men and women. In addition to this pipeline, young women of color also contend with a culture of low expectations stemming from gender and racial stereotyping and institutional inequalities that lead to a “school-to-low-wage-work pipeline.”

According to the National Women’s Law Center’s (NWLC) 2007 report—*When Girls Don’t Graduate, We All Fail*—40 percent of Black female students and 37 percent of Hispanic female students do not graduate high school, compared to just 22 percent of White female students. Too many girls of color are either pushed into the criminal justice system or relegated to a life of low-wage jobs on which they cannot sustain a family.

As Kimberlé Crenshaw, Executive Director of the African American Policy Forum (AAPF), writes in the foreword to a new AAPF report, “We can no longer afford to focus exclusively on the plight of Black boys and men and hope that in the end our work will translate entirely into intervention efforts intended to bring our girls and women out of crisis. Instead we must develop gender and race conscious lenses and interventions.” The Schott Foundation for Public Education and other philanthropic institutions can play a role in drawing attention to these issues by funding girls’ equity research

and small-scale programs—but there is significant need for policymakers to step up to the plate and ensure equity for girls in education.

The most critical challenge facing young women of color today is a lack of meaningful research detailing the barriers to their educational success. Data moves action—without hard data, we cannot hope to define a problem or develop systemic policy solutions. Producing this type of research is the first and most important goal of the Schott Foundation’s *Girls’ Equity Grant Program*. The program is also focused on creating an actionable blueprint for advocates and policymakers and funds academic and community-based organizations to begin building a movement for girls’ equity.

With our support, Ms. Crenshaw and the AAPF are conducting an in-depth examination of girls’ experiences and challenges in the classroom. Similarly, we are funding the NWLC to identify, compile, and present in a digestible and synthesized form, information

on the barriers to educational success facing girls of color. This research is critical to developing the framing and messaging of this issue, which organizers and advocates can then use to build public will for policy change.

In keeping with our foundation’s theory of change, our grant program also seeks to elevate the voices of those at the center of this crisis. We have funded the Wellesley Centers for Women project “Promoting Public Awareness of the Road to Educational Equity for Girls of Color” in conjunction with *Teen Voices*, a journalism-mentoring program for young women. The project recently produced a documentary featuring young women as the experts and agents of their own learning experiences and offered examples of effective strategies and solutions for closing the opportunity gap.

A particular hurdle in pursuing this work has been mobilizing our philanthropic colleagues to view the issues facing girls in education as the crisis it truly is. It has been challenging to make the case

to education funders that girls experience unique circumstances in the classroom, and women's and girls' foundations have not traditionally focused on the locale of schools. However, as we continue to fund academic and advocacy work, our colleagues are taking notice, and we believe the time is right to collectively lead and shape a discussion where previously no conversation existed.

However, there are limits to what the Schott Foundation, and philanthropy at large, are capable of doing. It is ultimately up to policymakers to make girls' equity and opportunity a legislative priority and institute systemic reforms.

Until the field of girls' equity research and advocacy can supply policy proposals specific to girls' issues, policymakers can put into effect proven reforms that benefit all students, which many states have begun to implement. As outlined in the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign's *2020 Vision Roadmap: A Pre-K Through Postsecondary Blueprint*, policymakers should:

- 1. Improve access to high quality early childhood and development programs:** Arkansas has proven to be a leader in improving universal access to pre-K and early learning services.
- 2. Increase overall school funding levels and ensure that funds are equitably**

distributed: Following *Abbott v. Burke*, New Jersey has moved towards a more equitable funding model to ensure students' zip codes do not determine their access to instructional resources.

- 3. Strengthen recruitment, preparation and distribution of high quality teachers and school leaders:** Illinois and South Carolina have placed a strong emphasis on the Grow Your Own Teachers program to support a diverse teaching workforce, and a 2009 Ohio law established residency programs for educators to prepare them to be effective school leaders.
- 4. Ensure access to a college- and career-ready curriculum:** In Texas, the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence ensures that students have the resources and opportunities they need to be on track for college.

This is an exciting time for the *Girls' Equity Grant Program*. The Schott Foundation is primed to help develop a new consciousness in education reform, one that does not forget about boys or leave them behind, but raises a new level of awareness about race and gender equity in education. We hope we can count on more leaders from our community to prioritize the growth and success of women of color and join this important fight for equity and justice. 



Dr. John H. Jackson became the President and CEO of The Schott Foundation for Public Education in July of 2007. In this role, Dr. Jackson leads the Foundation's efforts to ensure a high quality public education for all students regardless of race or gender. Prior to working with the Scott Foundation, Dr. Jackson served as NAACP Chief Policy Officer and National Director of Education. Dr. Jackson also served on the Obama-Biden transition team as a member of the President's 13-member Education Policy Transition Work Group.



Nakisha Lewis serves as Program Manager at the Schott Foundation for Public Education. In this role, Ms. Lewis is responsible for coordinating grant making activities that ensure all students have access to equitable education resources and a fair and substantive opportunity to learn by addressing systemic barriers that create vulnerable conditions for historically marginalized children and communities. Ms. Lewis has worked with the Schott Foundation since 2008.